



Spreading Christmas Cheer

by Geraldine Maison Halls

The Christmas season is a good time for persons to get in touch with friends and to extend warm Christmas and New Year greetings. Christmas 2012 was no exception for members of the Seniors Committee, as they visited and brought Christmas Cheer to the members of the Senior Class.

Once again, individual alumni employed in agencies such as the CARICOM Secretariat, Republic Bank, Bank of Guyana and the University of Guyana Medical School supported the initiative financially while business entities, through the good offices of alumna Angelique de Groot, provided items for the 22 hampers which were distributed. The other seniors received a floral arrangement or a bottle of wine. All 60 members of the Senior Class received a Christmas cake made by alumna Janice King Maison.

Some Seniors were a little coy initially about having their picture taken. However, several eventually posed for a picture, proudly displaying their gifts. In one instance, the help of a technologically astute 5-year old was solicited in taking pictures. Others posed with two "Santa's Helpers" who assisted a Committee member.

The visits to the Seniors at Christmas time are very special. They allow Seniors to engage Committee members in interesting chit-chat about their lives, the activities of the Seniors Programme and their anticipation of the next activity, which is the annual outing to places far from Georgetown. They also provide an opportunity for the alumnae to entertain and express their appreciation to members of the Seniors Committee for remembering and recognizing them.

Christmas Cheer is anticipated by those who benefited in the past. One Senior remarked, "I look forward to sharing the goodies with my family over the holidays". In a conversation after the holiday, another Senior wanted the Committee to know that "the cake was delicious".

Every year, new members join the Senior Class. One alumna who joined the Class during 2012 expressed surprise that she was remembered in her own right. Her first reaction was that she was included because of her offspring. Her delight at being recognized was obvious.

Alumnae who are 80 years and over and who reside overseas are also appreciative of the attention paid when they receive the Christmas card. Some choose to reciprocate, also demonstrating to members of the Seniors Committee that they are involved in a worthwhile venture.





Definitions

- ◆ Calories - tiny creatures which live in your closet and sew your clothes a little bit tighter every night.
- ◆ Adult - a person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.
- ◆ Beauty parlour - a place where women curl up and dye.
- ◆ Chickens - the only animals you eat before they are born and after they are dead.
- ◆ Committee - a body that keeps minutes and wastes hours.
- ◆ Secret - something you tell to one person at a time.
- ◆ Tomorrow - one of the greatest labour-saving devices of today.
- ◆ Yawn - an honest opinion openly expressed.
- ◆ Wrinkles - something other people have, similar to my character lines.

Questions and Answers

Q: Where can men over the age of 60 find younger women who are interested in them?

A: Try a bookstore under fiction.

Q: What can a man do while his wife is going through menopause?

A: Keep busy. If you're handy with tools, you can finish the basement. When you're done you'll have a place to live.

Q: How can you increase the heart rate of your 60-plus year-old husband?

A: Tell him you're pregnant.

Q: How can you avoid that terrible curse of the elderly wrinkles?

A: Take off your glasses.

Q: Why should 60-plus year-old people use valet parking?

A: Valets don't forget where they park your car.

Q: Is it common for 60-plus year olds to have problems with short-term memory storage?

A: Storing memory is not a problem. Retrieving it is the problem.

Q: As people age, do they sleep more soundly?

A: Yes, but usually in the afternoon.

Q: Where should 60-plus year-olds look for eye glasses?

A: On their foreheads.

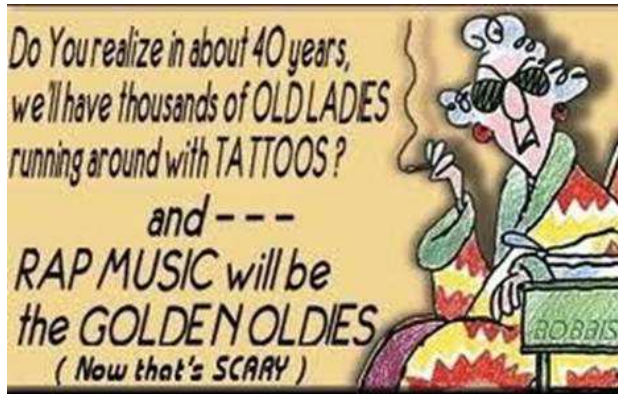
Q: Leading cause of diminished sex drive among senior citizens ?

A: Nudity

Q: What is the most common remark made by 60-plus year-olds when they enter antique stores?

A: "Gosh, I remember these!"

Ha ha!



Meet the Seniors

The Senior Class in Guyana currently has 60 members. The Senior Programme also reaches out to 39 senior alumnae, those who are 80 years and over, in the diaspora. In this issue we begin providing profiles of one senior who lives in Guyana and one from the diaspora.

In this issue, we feature Phyllis Thompson who currently resides in the Gentlewomen's Home on Brickdam in Georgetown and Leila Blackman of the New York Tristate Chapter.

Phyllis Taitt Thompson

Phyllis entered Bishops' High School from Dolphin's Prep School in 1926 and completed her tenure in 1933. This member of Mary House joined her sisters Irma and Audrey when Ms. Baskett was Principal. At that time, approximately 100 children attended the school and everybody knew everyone else.

Phyllis remembers playing games such as basketball and rounders and enjoying country dancing taught by Ms. Bunny Burrowes, one of the teachers. She joined the other students in physical drills taught by Ms. Jackman who was fondly known as Jacko.

In those days, girls at BHS also played cricket and benefited in singing through the efforts of Ms. Farrell.

Phyllis joined St. Andrew's Kirk when she was twelve years old, eventually becoming a member of the church choir; the choir was accompanied by her father, Mr. Taitt, who was the organist. She is an elder of the church, although she is now inactive.

After leaving school, Phyllis joined the British Guiana Club where she played lawn tennis. The Club also allowed members to participate in football and cycling.

Phyllis worked in the public service in Barbados and Guyana. In Barbados, she was attached to the Colonial Office and the Department of Development and Welfare while in Guyana she worked in the Department of Agriculture.

Phyllis was the wife of Adrian Thompson, Guyana's renowned mountain climber and botanist, who planted the flag of Guyana on Mount Ayanganna on the night of the country's Independence on the 26th May, 1966.



As the oldest of the seniors in Guyana, Phyllis holds pride of place. She celebrated her 91st birthday while being involved in the computer classes for seniors in 2007 and participated in the annual outings up to March 2009.

Her service as a member of the Gentle Women's Relief Association enabled her to provide support to seniors who were in need of comfortable accommodation and care later in life. Little did Phyllis know that at the time that she would benefit from the efforts of the organization of which she once served as Vice-President. She now resides at the Gentle Women's Home.

Leila Thorne Blackman

Leila was actually born in Harlem, New York on August 28, 1929. She moved to Guyana when her Guyanese parents re-migrated. She was less than a year old at the time.

Leila attended Miss Chapman's private school. In 1941, Leila entered the Bishops' High School under the tutelage of Headmistresses Mrs. Aileen Allen and Ms. Molly Harris. She was a member of Mary House but later moved to Elizabeth House when this House was added, attaining the position of Elizabeth House Captain and being appointed a Prefect before she left the school in 1948.

Leila's friends at school included Linotte Royer, Joyce and Sheila Petrie, Clarissa Archer and Magda Pollard.

Her fond memories of BHS include those of the eccentric Mrs. House and her vintage car which required her to use an umbrella when it rained, drill with Miss Smailes and Ms. Lilian Dewar who invoked silence in her students by remarking, "Empty vessels make most sound".

At BHS, Leila discovered her love of drama after being cast in many productions by Mrs. Allen. She continued to hone her dramatic skills as a member of the BHS Old Girls' Guild and the Georgetown Drama Club. She was also a founder member of the Theatre Guild.

In Guyana, Leila was fortunate to work at the Georgetown Public Library where she was employed in the reference division. While there, she particularly enjoyed doing the "Children's Story Hour", and her accomplishments included organizing a book display, "Alice in the Wonderland of Books" for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the library.

In 1961, Leila left Guyana to pursue a college education, attending Fisk University in Tennessee and Fordham University in New York, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. She was very involved in the Administration for Children's Services of New York City (NYC) retiring as a Supervisor 11. She was a member of the Union and at one time was Chairperson of President Charles Ensley. It was the government and policies of NYC, a cause for which she fought, participating in many demonstrations and protests.



Leila is also very passionate about the First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, elder and once served as the chaplain of the Presbyterian Women's Group, a group of which she remains a member. She participates in the Bereavement and Small Group Ministries. Other notable contributions made to the First Presbyterian Church include volunteering at the Alice Horn Gift Shop, member of the Mission and Interpretation Committee and past secretary of Presbyterian Women.

Leila was married to the late David Blackman and spent 36 wonderful years with him before his passing in November 2009. Currently retired, but no less busy, Leila continues her active lifestyle, through her involvement in First Church and socialization with family, friends, ex co-workers and the BHSAA New York Tri-State Chapter.

